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The Confessing Subject and the Construction of Modern Catholic Selves

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ABSTRACT: Historians and sociologists have argued that the practices of confession played a major role in the transition to modern, introspective individuality. Until the 1970s, though, the literature had dealt mostly with Protestantism and Protestant modes of confession, first and foremost the practice of writing spiritual diaries and then reading and rereading them. The article looks at Catholic confessional practices and how they, too, have shaped modern notion of subjecthood. Centering on Foucault's contribution, the article argues that Catholic confession, just like its Protestant avatar, paved a route to modernity.

KEYWORDS: Confession; Michel Foucault; Confessionalization; Modernity; Subjecthood; Truth-telling.

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RESUMEN: *El sujeto confesante y la construcción de la individualidad católica moderna.*- Tanto historiadores como sociólogos han defendido que las prácticas de confesión tuvieron un papel fundamental en el paso hacia una individualidad moderna, introspectiva. Sin embargo, hasta la década de los setenta del siglo XX la mayor parte de la literatura se centró en el Protestantismo y en los modos de confesión protestante, sobre todo en la práctica de escritura de diarios espirituales así como su posterior lectura y relectura. Este artículo explora las prácticas de confesión católicas y como estas, también, moldearon la noción moderna de subjetividad. Centrándose en la contribución de Foucault, el artículo defiende que la confesión Católica, al igual que su avatar protestante, allanó el camino hacia la modernidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Confesión; Michel Foucault; Confesionalización; Modernidad; Subjetividad; Contar la Verdad.

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MODERNITY AND RELIGION BEYOND WEBER

Different sets of binary oppositions have dominated much of the twentieth-century's scholarship on the transition to modernity. This was due mostly, of course, to the immense impact of the German sociologist Max Weber and his thesis concerning the affinities between Protestantism and capitalism. As is well known, Weber's discussion of modernity presents a "supersessionist" paradigm that posits--sometimes explicitly but mostly

implicitly—that a Catholic worldview, dominated by irrational and magical thinking, communal (non-individual) sources of identity, and mechanical performance of ritualistic acts, was replaced in modernity by Protestantism, individualism, capitalist accumulation of wealth, and rationality. In modernity, a period whose starting point is, roughly speaking, in the second half of the sixteenth century, exteriority and performativity were substituted by the acquisition of both introspective and abstractive modes of thinking and being (Weber, 1930).

The notion of ‘modern subjectivity,’ the topic of both the current issue of *Culture & History* and of this article, is thus part and parcel of the Weberian paradigm. Put differently, Weber’s thesis addressed not merely an economic development. In addition to creating a new economic regime, Protestantism, alleged Weber, had given birth to a new form of subjectivity and to new ways of acquiring subjectivity. A deeply-felt sense of theo-psychological angst, and, as a consequence, a drive to outperform oneself in a futile effort to calm one’s ceaseless self-questioning, according to Weber, created new selves, for whom self-doubt and the need to overcome it became the very core of one’s identity. In modernity, the self is first and foremost a self-interrogating machine; introspection is the essence of modern subjecthood.

It goes without saying that the Weberian modern self is much more than just introspection and anxiety. It is also characterized by a profit-driven activity in the economic realm, and a curiosity vis-à-vis the created world, and by political rationality. The modern subject practices a specific mode of independence and self-possession in his actions in the public sphere (and my use of the pronoun ‘he’ is not accidental; the characteristics of the Weberian modern subject make him implicitly male and exclude females from being capable of acquiring modern subjectivity). The Weberian argument further claimed that this new individual had not existed (or had been less common) prior to Western Protestant modernity. Weaving together historical, theological, economic, and psychological threads, Weber’s paradigm could be viewed as one of the most courageous attempts to offer a theoretical model of the transition to modernity. Its theoretical model of self-realization within prescribed settings influenced, among many others, Anthony Giddens and Peter Wagner, two of the leading theoreticians of modernity in the last quarter of the twentieth century (Giddens, 1984; Wagner, 1994).

In the 1970s and ‘80s, however, some historians and sociologists have started to challenge the validity of the Weberian paradigm or some of its parts. Since then, questions have been raised as to whether we have ever been modern and whether modernity, as it has been theorized and used in the social and humanistic sciences, is a Eurocentric concept whose usefulness has passed (Latour, 1993; Mitchell, 2000; Chakrabarty, 2007). Feminist scholars equally rejected most aspects of the Weberian paradigm of the modern subject with the simple but acute observation that the major characteristics of the modern subject, namely individuality, independence, and the capacity to act as an agent, are all gendered (Morgan, 1997; Bologh, 2009). Finally, Sociologist Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and his many followers have argued for the coexistence of multiple trajectories of modernities and insisted on the conjectural history of Western modernity (Eisenstadt, 2000). For the purpose of this article, I ignore this immense, varied, and sophisticated body of criticisms leveled by philosophers, sociologists, and historians against Weber’s theory. I do not discuss these challenges not because I disagree with them. On the contrary, for the pur-

pose of this article I ignore them because I find that the Weberian paradigm has become so ubiquitous and has shaped our thinking to such a degree that there is no escaping it. It has supplies all of us (scholars and lay people alike) with a generalized notion of modernity that is the only basis for any conversation concerning the modern world, even—and maybe especially—when the goal of the conversation is to dismantle the entire Weberian construct. Simply put, even opposition to the Weberian paradigm cannot be articulated outside the Weberian language and his (alleged or real) sets of affinities among modernity, individualism, introspection, and religion. A rare example of a frontal challenge to the Weberian paradigm was launched by German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, who argued that the Jesuits’ discovery of absolute obedience to, and dependence on God for human self-assertion participated in the invention of modern subjectivity. In what follows, I, too, turn to the Jesuits, but argue, instead, that it was their cultivation of the practices of confession that should be credited with what Sloterdijk calls modern self-stylization (Sloterdijk 2013:57-65).

THE CONFESSING SUBJECT OF MODERNITY

Among the numerous challenges to the Weberian paradigm since the 1970s and ‘80s, the Catholic practice of sacramental auricular confession played a significant role. It was by discussing the sense of guilt and the sacrament of penance, I suggest, that historians have offered new narratives of the transition to modernity and of the invention of the modern introspective subject, narratives that put into question the Weberian affinity between modernity and Protestantism. In this article, I will discuss three late-twentieth-century theories and their contribution to new ways of thinking about subjectivity, modernity, and religions in early modern Europe.

The French historian Jean Delumeau and his British contemporary John Bossy were the first to revive the interest in penance and confession as historical topics of investigation (Delumeau, 1983; 1990; Bossy, 1975). They did not challenge Weber directly, but their alternative theory of modernity examined the Catholic Reformation and its contribution to the formation of a new subjectivity. As such, their historical investigations enable us to see to what degree Weber’s paradigm does justice to developments within the other major branch of early modern Christianity, namely Catholicism. The two historians argued that a slow process, whose origins go back to the twelfth century and whose apogee occurred at the Church Council of Trent in the middle of the sixteenth century, instilled new notions of guilt, shame, and fear in Christian souls. Delumeau’s corpus of writings offers the most detailed histories of both confession and the sense of sin from the early Middle Ages until the modern age. John Bossy’s more concise discussions argue that a process of interiorization of a sense of guilt was taking place in the later Middle Ages. It led people to understand sin and its consequence, namely a sense of guilt, as a personal and individual responsibility. High and Late medieval Christi-

anity slowly but steadily taught the centrality of private confession as a precondition for personal salvation. By so doing, according to Bossy, this process eroded longstanding notions of selfhood and guilt that had been communal or community-related. Following their contribution, there is no denying that a deep sense of personal culpability and an on-going process of individualization and privatization of the sense of guilt shaped souls in Europe way before the Protestant Reformation. And as Bossy and other have convincingly documented, it was a major part of a post-Tridentine Catholic teaching (Tentler, 1977; Prosperi, 1996; Romeo, 1997)

A second theoretical challenge has been advanced by the promoters of the “Confessionalization Theory.” Scholars who adhere to this school, whose leading proponents have been the German historians Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling, are usually more loyal to the Weberian tradition. This makes sense as most of their writings have dealt with new forms of authority and subject-formation in Protestant German territories and political entities (Hsia, 1989; Schilling, 1992; 1995; Brady, 2004). By the term ‘confessionalization,’ scholars refer to the collaborative endeavor of state and church in Protestant countries and territories to create new submissive subjects. During a long process, stretching from the early sixteenth century to the middle years of the following century, religious changes, moral reforms, state formation, and various civilizing processes coalesced. Norbert Elias’s celebrated term ‘civilizing process’ usually refers to changes in the political sphere. These changes were driven by the rising nation-state and its bourgeois agents, and led to an imposition of upper-class norms of conduct and rationality on members of lower classes (Elias, 2000; Mitzman, 1987; Powell, 2013). The term confessionalization, as we have already noticed, refers to processes in the religious sphere. And yet, the joining together of these transformative forces contributed to a wide-ranging and all-encompassing enterprise of social control, as well as to a major re-formation and manufacturing of modern obedient selves. As said, the Confessionalization School deals mostly with territories belonging to the Holy Roman Empire, but it has had a direct impact on a comparative study of modes of confessionalization (Reinhard, 1977; Reinhard and Schilling, 1995). Italian and Italian-shaped scholarship argued, similarly, that new notions of guilt, truth, and subject formation shaped Counter-Reformation Italy (and other Catholic areas) (Di Simplicio, 1994; Romeo, 1997; De Boer, 2001; Lavenia, 2004).

The term confessionalization is obviously employed by its promoters in this context to indicate adherence to a *confession*, or a creed of a specific faith, rather than as the act of verbal admission of sins to another person. The linguistic confusion notwithstanding, I want to emphasize that moral reform and surveillance mechanisms, the two engines of the confessionalization reform, could not, in fact, have taken place without the invention, cultivation, and proliferation of forms of investigation of sinful (and criminal) behaviors. They also required, or at least encouraged, a recognition of sin or criminality by the sin-

ners or criminals. Thus, whereas for Delumeau and Bossy, the historians of Catholic confessional practices, the implementation of sacramental confession as a mandatory practice of avowal was a theological and pastoral development, for the scholars of the Confessionalization School, the process was mostly political, judicial, and social. And while the two historians of Catholicism highlighted the internal process of transformation of selves, the confessionalization theorists emphasized external techniques and practices of surveillance and control.

Challenging the validity of the Confessionalization Theory for Catholic territories is not my goal in this article. It is worth pointing out, though, that Catholic theologians in the middle years of the sixteenth century, especially during the Council of Trent, were promoting and reaffirming the mandatory nature and salvific potential of sacramental confession at the very same time that philosophers and legal scholars in Catholic countries (and beyond) were starting to debate the epistemological, legal, and psychological validities of confession, and whether confession was a reliable tool for reaching truth. These doubts would later lead to the undermining of the judicial rationales for torture and for the gradual replacement of this practice by new means of forensic evidence. Some legal scholars had always warned that physical torture and emotional fear threatened the credibility of confession. Now new voices raised doubts, pointing out that ventriloquism, mental incapacity, and sheer imbecility, too, call into question the reliability of people’s avowals of their acts and thoughts. Thus, the promotion of confession within the Catholic religious sphere coincided with an unprecedented questioning of the validity of confession in secular spheres, and the promotion of external and therefore circumstantial evidence as a precondition for a guilt-verdict. This process slowly led to the decline, and in some cases even dismissal, of the traditional status of (secular) confession as the Queen of Proofs (Mandrou, 1958; Langbein, 1974; Maclean, 1992; Krause, 2015). These antithetical processes should warn us against reading an all-encompassing process of subjugation by means of truth-telling that allegedly reshaped all spheres of life in early modern Europe.

A third theory of modernity and modern subjectivity was developed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, who, in his writings of the very same years, reshaped our notions of the historicity of selfhood, power, and knowledge, and of the role of what he named “veridiction,” (*véridiction*) or truth-telling, in all of the above. For Foucault, who was familiar with some of Delumeau’s writings, confession was the paradigmatic incarnation of the nexus power/knowledge in pre-secular Europe (Foucault, 1977: 27; Delumeau, 1983: 10). More than any other historian of religion or of modernity, he offered the most dynamic interpretation of the role of confession in the incubation and formation of modernity. Admittedly, Foucault developed this connection mostly in his writings on late antiquity. But morphologically and contextually, the same could be said of early modern Europe. Furthermore, I will argue below that he had early modern Ca-

tholicism in mind when he presented the cognitive revolutions concerning sinfulness he attributed to late antiquity (Foucault, 2000: 135-52; 1997: 199; 2003: 167-99; 2007; 2012a; 2012b). And as we have already seen, that had been the case with Delumeau and Bossy, and with the German promoters of the Confessionalization Theory, namely that the Catholic practices of confession were central to his notions of modernity and of modern selfhood. Historians have rushed to point out the degree to which Foucault's "entire discussion of the concept of confession lacks sufficient theoretical weight from which to establish any coherent position." This was not a sacrilegious statement; Foucault himself admitted as much (Carrette, 2000: 38; Taylor, 2009). And yet, there is much value to his theorization of confession, both in terms of its actual content and in light of the fact that his assumptions, be they historically and theologically sound or shaky, have come to dominate most discussions of confession in Catholic Western culture and in Western modernity, just as Weber had shaped the discussion before him.

Foucault never wrote the fourth and fifth volumes of his *History of Sexuality* that he had intended to discuss the development of confession as a critical nexus of power and knowledge and the way by which subject formation and subjugation overlapped in the Middle Ages. But he has left behind enough lectures and short articles to reconstruct his arguments about the role the practice of sacramental confession played in the transition to modernity in the sixteenth century. It is to these fragments that I now turn. The argument of this article is very simple. I suggest that, parallel to the coming into being of Protestant modes of subject formation and subjects, early modern Europe witnessed the development and proliferation of Catholic techniques of introspection and individuation. These practices, just like Protestant techniques, cultivated new recognition of guilt and shame, and new means of internalizing a new cognitive sense of who-am-I-ness. I will also suggest that these changes took place within the setting of thinking about, writing on, and undertaking confession.

THE MEDIEVAL CONFESSING SUBJECT

What does the transition to modern subjecthood look like from the Catholic perspective, using Delumeau's and Bossy's detailed histories of penance and Foucault's theorizing of the role of truth-telling in both subject-formation and subjugation? We should first point out that, unlike the Weberian paradigm, this transition to modern introspective subjecthood was a very slow but steady process of interiorization of the recognition of guilt and the cultivation of a sense of contrition that had started at least four hundred years prior to the Protestant Reformation. Institutionally, the most important moment of transition in the history of confession and the sacrament of penance was the requirement, put forward by the Fourth Lateran Church Council of 1215, that all Christians attend confession on a yearly basis and confess the sins they commit-

ted since their last confession (Lea 1896; rep. 1968; Bériou 1983; Biller 1998). Theologically, as good a place as any other to start is maybe the Cistercian abbot Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). Recalling his own spiritual growth, St. Bernard praised the discretion and honesty of a monk named Humbert who had served as his spiritual director. "I had so often the opportunity of placing my head on his breast. But I am not the only one who knew him in this way . . . who is there who . . . did not learn the sources and remedy from his mouth? He knew so well to penetrate into the corners of a sick conscience that he who went to confess to him might have believed that he had seen everything, been present at everything." (Clairvaux, 1957-1977). In a point that is germane to my argument, here (and elsewhere) Bernard uses the term *confessio* to indicate not sacramental confession but rather spiritual colloquy. Whereas in the past it had been possible to separate the care of souls and the cultivation of introspection and conversion from confession, St. Bernard experienced a new version of this ancient monastic practice.

In the isolated monasteries of the Eastern Mediterranean and Egypt and then in the wilderness of Europe, where the Christian practice of directing souls had been shaped, the cure of souls was taking place within an intimate setting that involved a personal engagement of the director with the hidden secrets of the practitioner's heart. Spiritual direction was a voluntary endeavor, and the advisee, who sought the director's advice, determined the content of the discussion. It was recommended to open one's soul to the director as one might open a book for him to read, but it was never a requirement. The director, in turn, was to offer advice based on the commonality of all sinners, as well as on the unique experiences described to him by the individual advisee. The goal of confession is salvation, whereas direction of souls is characterized by advice and psychagogy, namely the formation of the soul. Prior to the thirteenth century, confession, lest we forget, had been conducted usually in public and was a communal event. And once it became mandatory in nature, it entailed complete exposure on the part of the confessant and complete amnesia on the part of the confessor. The director of souls, for his part, exerted a moral, pedagogical, and charismatic – but never legal or sacramental – authority over the advisee. In stark contrast to the confessional experience, the director was expected to remember the content of previous contacts with the advisee, as each exchange was presumed to be only a single encounter in an on-going spiritual engagement. And while confession dealt with the past, spiritual direction often dealt with the topography and movements of the soul in the present and with the means of acquiring self-knowledge and self-mastery and of becoming a better Christians in the future.

Important as they are, such theological, pastoral, and psychological distinctions between the art of confessing souls and the art of spiritual directing should not be overestimated. From the twelfth century on, due to St. Bernard (and others), we see them eroding. In fact, both con-

fessor and spiritual director were likened from this time on to ‘physicians of the soul,’ a comparison and a term that went back at least to the earliest Dominican Constitution (1220). The Florentine Dominican preacher Giovanni Dominici (1356-1419) used this image in his *Regola del governo di cura familiare*, and his student, the moral theologian and archbishop of Florence Antonino of Florence (1389-1459) employed it later in his popular guide for confessors *Summa Confessionalis, Curam illios habes* of 1472 (Dominici, 1860; Pierozzi, 1481; see also Seneca 1928-35). For Antonino, only such correction can ensure the full benefits of the sacrament of confession. The image then made its way into the Roman Ritual of 1614, and by the seventeenth century, the comparison of the confessor to a physician of the soul is ubiquitous (De Boer 2001: 53-63; Malgarini and Turrini 2004: 210-20). Jean Gerson (1363-1429) was another authority who conflated the distinction between the direction of souls and sacramental confession. Echoing the fourth-century Gregory of Nyssa, Gerson said that “the art of arts is the direction of souls.” For him, it was obvious that direction occurred during the hearing of confessions (Gerson, 1998).

For Bernard and Gerson, then, and following them, to many theologians, confessors, and superiors, confession forgives the past but also shapes the future. Contrition called for a personal admission and recognition of guilt. Dominican philosopher Cardinal Thomas Cajetan (1469-1534) referred to this stage as the *actus veritatis*, the avowal, the prerequisite that makes penance and thence conversion possible. Cajetan here captures well the new emphasis on recognition of oneself as a sinner, regardless of one’s actions in the world (Cajetan, 1530; see also Foucault, 2012b: 78-82).

This new amalgamation had an immense impact on the scholastic pastoral theology of the following centuries. Traditionally, *Cura animarum* had been one of the major responsibilities of superiors in monastic communities. The practice remained a form of sporadic spiritual advice rather than a continuous relation with a follower, and the advice was only rarely tailored to the trainee (Tilatti, 1996). But in the later Middle Ages it was slowly becoming part and parcel of the practice of confession. In the sacrament of penance, the role of the penitential obligation (*satisfactio*) decreased, while contrition (*contritio in corde*) and repentance became the more significant aspects of the sacrament. Interestingly, this interiorization of the sense of sin went hand in hand with an exteriorization of guilt: the confessant was to repent internally, to confess verbally to a confessor, and to manifest sincere contrition, but also to perform visual acts of satisfaction (Tentler, 1977; Hahn, 1982). This complex process, analyzed by Delumeau and Bossy, contributed to an entire cottage industry of studies of confession and its impact in late medieval and early modern Catholicism. Suffice it to mention the important contributions of Thomas Tentler (1977), Prosperi (1996), Myers (1996), Romeo (1997), Vincenzo Lavenia (2004), de Boer (2001) and O’Banion (2012).

The conflation into one of the roles of confessor and spiritual director contributed to a number of cognitive and

affective changes. Confession now became a mechanism for a systematic interiorization of a sense of wrong-doing, accompanied by a cultivation and recognition of a sense of guilt. At the same time, confession, a traditional part of the sacrament of penance, was now also serving as a setting that helped its practitioners to acquire a deeper understanding of their sinful essence, namely their internal selves as sinning selves. At the same time, the setting of the sacramental confession was used now as an opportunity for the confessant to acquire knowledge in how to set life goals. As such, the early modern confession was a practice that joined past (sins) and future (goals) into a coherent self, a self that is being formed through the dialogical relation with the confessor that is taking place in the present. It was this process, namely confession as the process of making sense of one’s entire life--past, present, and future--that Michel Foucault had in mind when, in 1981 or ‘82, he coined the term subjectivization (*subjectivization*).

THE JESUIT MODE OF SUBJECTIVIZATION

Foucault’s genealogies of the power of confession to elicit new notions of knowledge and thence new forms of discipline and self-discipline, as well as the relations of power to subject-formation, truth-telling, and historical change hovered above his entire work (Chevallier, 2011; Taylor, 2009). And yet, he never wrote much about early modern Catholicism. His discussions of “The Classical Age”--the French term for early modernity, of the new fields of knowledge and power that were created in the seventeenth century, and of René Descartes and Absolutism never refer to the Council of Trent, for example, or to the Society of Jesus. This is the case even though almost all of the literary references he supplied for his discussion of Christian practices and theological discussion that document events and processes beyond the Church Fathers refer repeatedly and almost solely not to medieval theological and pastoral texts but to early modern manuals (Foucault, 2003; 2007). This lacuna (and the reasons for it) notwithstanding, I want to reconstruct in the following paragraphs the French philosopher’s argument about the role of confession in the creating of modern subjectivities.

By means of confession, Foucault argued, “everyone in Christianity had to explore who he is, what is happening within himself, the faults he might have committed or may commit, and the temptations to which he is exposed. Moreover, everyone is obliged to tell these things to other people, and hence bear witness against himself,” he stated (Foucault, 1999: 182-3). For Foucault, then, confession was first and foremost a cognitive-psychological “ritual of discourse where the subject who speaks corresponds with the subject of the statement.” During confession, the confessing person acquires the modern notion of selfhood as a quest for, and belief in a pre-existing internal truth. Confessing is a mode of self-formation as a subject, a subject who has an essence, an internal truth that defines it. The dynamics of confession, however, are never an ex-

ercise in self-formation by introspecting and truth-telling to the inquiring self itself. They are also always dialogic: one confesses to another person or entity. As such, the production of truth about one's self, which is also the production of the self, is also always already the production of the subject as subjugated to the authority of the listener. Confession produces not only subjects but also subjugation to authority and to the government of the self by itself.

While this process of self-formation by means of truth-telling had been a major part of Christianity from its inception, in a lecture at the Collège de France on March 17, 1982, Foucault explained that Cassian's exercises of self-knowledge "will live throughout Christianity and reappear with new, greater dimensions and a new, stronger intensity in the sixteenth century, and especially in the Counter Reformation." (Foucault, 2004: 422; cf. 309). Similarly, describing the practice of spiritual exercises that train individuals in scrutinizing themselves in order to find faults and develop guilt, Foucault elaborated that "it is striking how important it was in the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries for Christianity to define each exercise in its specificity, to prescribe the ordering of these exercises in relation to each other and their temporal succession according to the day, week, month, year, and also of the individual's progress." And he went on:

"At the end of the sixteenth century a truly pious person's life – and I am not even talking about members of seminaries or monks; I am talking about the entire Catholic world – was literally carpeted and lined with exercises, which had to be kept up and practiced daily and hourly, according to times of the day, circumstances, moments of life, and degree of advancement in spiritual exercises. There were entire manuals explaining all the exercises you had to do at each of these moments; there was no moment of life that did not have to be doubled, prompted, and underpinned by a certain type of exercise" (Foucault, 2004: 423).

Foucault was referring, of course, to Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* and to the many renditions and variations of this foundational text (Loyola, 1992). And while they are never named explicitly, Foucault could not but have had them in mind. Spiritual exercises usually led to confession of sins. In Loyola's celebrated collection, too, the goal of the first week of exercises is a recognition of guilt, an enhanced sense of contrition, and a general confession, the latter being a precondition to advancing spiritually and gaining consolation (Sluhovsky, 2013).

Whatever the reasons for his omission of Loyola's name, Foucault was right that early modern Christian spiritual exercises conflated confession, spiritual direction, and spiritual growth. They required the trainer in spiritual exercises to guide the practitioner into recognition of "the truth about himself. It is, I think, an absolutely crucial moment in the history of subjectivity in the West, or in the relations between subjectivity and truth, when the task of obligation of truth-telling about oneself is inserted within the procedure indispensable for salvation, within techniques of the development and transfor-

mation of the subject by himself, and within pastoral institutions" (Foucault, 2005: 364). For Foucault, then, the end result of spiritual exercises was subjectivization. This was a process of a subjectivization into a subjecthood that had unique characteristics. First and foremost, it always identified the self with guilt and shame. It always created both the modern self and the self-rejection or abjection of this modern self. We are modern, one could say, in as far as we are culpable and insofar as we overcome our bodies and ourselves.

Using Foucault's theorization of the process of subjectivization is helpful, I suggest, to recalibrating the process of the consolidation a mechanism of control put forward by the Confessionalization Theory. The political/pastoral amalgamation of powers and truth, operated by interiorization of guilt and by confessing, characterized modern Christian culture in both Protestant and Catholic avatars. This was partly due to the fact that it was only since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that Police and Government (both in the wider, French early-modern sense of the terms) became the general order of European powers. The practice of confession as means of self-formation took slightly different shapes in the rival religious cultures. Catholics, as we have seen, could only reach their subjectivization through confession to a director of souls, who often serves also as a confessor, while Protestants could often confess to their diaries (and thus become their own directors of souls once they leafed through and reread their own confessions). Be the religious context what it may, from the dawn of modernity, modern selves have been monitored not only by external apparatuses of information-gathering that possessed means to examine, analyze, and control the subjects. Foucault, in fact, added what was missing from the Confessionalization Theory: the new control mechanisms operated also—and, in fact, more importantly--within the self itself. Early modern confessional practices were guilt-producing mechanisms that functioned, as the Confessionalization Paradigm argues, in the service of the disciplinary regimes of state and church (Foucault, 1978). Their practitioners internalized guilt and submission to authority and by so doing were made into docile citizens. Equally important, I suggest, is that by means of confession, the modern self comes to recognize himself or herself as the holder of a truth about the self. In modernity, confession to self, to a priest, and later on to the policeman, the physician, or the psychoanalyst have all become disciplinary mechanisms that produce a new form of subjecthood, a personal and political order in which one no longer merely submits to authority but becomes "the authority who requires the confession" (Foucault, 1978: 61; 2003: 167-99; 2012).

The manufacturing of a truth about the self is surely both the main goal and the actual process of confessional practices. Foucault was right to insist on the centrality and persistence, in Western thought, of the Augustinian dictum that "by making truth inside oneself, one could get access to the light" (*qui facit veritatem venit ad lucem*) (quoted in Foucault, 1997: 202). "I have a very strong Christian, Catholic background, and I am not

ashamed of it,” Foucault declared in a roundtable discussion in 1983. And in a conversation a few years earlier, when provoked by a young hitchhiker who argued that what is left of the church today is nothing but simulacrum and that there are “not many people left who take an interest in all that,” Foucault laughed and agreed: “there is only me left.”¹ This Christian sensibility might have been what enabled him to see both sides of the dyadic relation between the confessant and the confessor. The confessant was, obviously, subjugating himself or herself to the authority of the spiritual director/confessor. But the confessor was only a vehicle for sacramental grace, and as such the dynamic was taking place not between the practitioner and the confessor but between the practitioner and God. It was God, not a human agent of this-worldly authorities, such as the ecclesiastical church or the secular state, that lay at the core of Christian ontology and practices of confession. God was the light at the end of the tunnel, the goal that was worth striving for and that justified in the eyes of believers the effort, the shame and guilt, and the submission to clerical authority. This light, what Augustine called the “truth that dwells in the inward man” (*In interiore homine habitat veritas*), however, was, at the end of the day, not the practitioner’s true inner self but the re-meeting of the self with the image of God within.²

SUMMARY

Modernity and subjectivization came to the world joined like Siamese twins. The co-existence of the opposing tendencies toward freedom and discipline and the process of increased individualization by submission to growing mechanisms of self-control are at the very core of the transition of modern subjecthood. These ambivalences, that have been theorized by Weber, Giddens, Wagner, Sloterdijk, and, above all, Foucault, have shaped numerous domains of social and psychological life of modern subjects. The Catholic sacrament of confession, I argue, was a practice whose centrality to the Catholic sense of who-am-I-ness was crucial for the stylization of the modern Catholic subject way beyond the sphere of religious practices and beliefs. Confession was, indeed, as Foucault has convincingly theorized, a process of self-formation by means of introspection, narration, and verbalization, and subjugation to authority (both external and internal) was an integral part of it. But at its theological core, confession entailed not only disciplinary submission but also liberation. The hermeneutics of the self were a restructuring of one’s subjectivity by substituting one form of control for another: submission to God was liberation from control of Satan. Foucault taught us that there is no human setting immune to power. Confession, too, was surely not a release from power relations into a realm of (imaginary and non-existent) freedom. But within the Christian onto-theology from whence it sprang, shifting from being subjected to Satan to being subjugated to God was conceptualized as liberation. In one of the few surviving fragments from the never-published fourth volume of his *History of Sexuality* Foucault, in fact, recognized

this point. Elaborating on the connection between the act of verbalization of confession to another human being and the ability to enhance one’s relations with the divine, Foucault explained: “One has to rid oneself of the power of the Other, the Enemy, who hides behind seeming likenesses of oneself, and eternal warfare has to be waged against this Other, which one cannot win without the help of the Almighty, who is mightier than he. Confession to others, submission to their advice and permanent obedience to one’s superiors are essential in this battle” (Foucault, 1999:196).

NOTES

- 1 Foucault’s archives, Document D250(7); Conversation with P. Rabinow, B. Dreyfus et al., Berkeley, April 21, 1983; quoted in (Bernauer, 2004: 97). Foucault, “On Religion (1978)”, in (Carrette, 1999: 109).
- 2 Augustine, *De vera religione* 39.72; and see the discussion in (Taylor, 1989: 127-42 and Schuld, 2003).

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